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Educators' Perspectives and Approaches to Teaching in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Karmen Melissa Stephenson entitled "Educators' Perspectives and Approaches to Teaching in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Anthropology.

Gregory V. Button, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Michael H. Logan, De Ann Pendry

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES TO TEACHING IN CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

A Thesis Presented for
The Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Karmen Melissa Stephenson
August 2010

DEDICATION

On behalf of my sister Kandace and myself, I dedicate this thesis

to the memory of our parents,

Kathryn C. Stephenson and James R. Stephenson.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A very difficult time for my family during my father's illness significantly delayed this research, and without the patience and understanding of the Department of Anthropology and the help of my fellow teaching assistants at the University of Tennessee I would not have been able to spend those months with my family before coming back to this project. I would like to thank my Advisor, Dr. Gregory Button, and Committee Member Dr. Michael Logan, for their help with the design and implementation of this research and for their advisement in the writing process. I would like to thank Committee Member Dr. DeAnn Pendry for helping me develop the research questions that led to this project. Her knowledge and her ability to ask the right questions were vital in transforming my interests and abstract ideas into an ethnographic study.

Many thanks go to the Midway School System and especially the principal and teachers of Midway High School for their participation in this project (here and throughout this text I use pseudonyms for the name of the school, the town in which this research was conducted, and the participants in this project). These teachers welcomed me into their classrooms and generously gave of their time both in interviews and on a daily basis. Being a high school teacher was the most challenging job I ever had, and the hard work and candid, honest reflections that the participants in this study shared with me have been an invaluable resource in this project. They not only contributed to the completion of this master's thesis, but the experiences they shared with me have inspired more questions and strengthened my dedication to educational research. Most

importantly, these teachers have reminded me of the importance of people in an educational system that has become characterized by numbers and statistics.

Thanks to my friends, Corinne Tandy and Jaymelee Kim, for their (very) creative help in generating a list of names that I used as pseudonyms for the school and the teachers who participated in this research.

Lastly, I would like to thank my "little" sister, Kandace, whose strength and maturity I have admired and relied upon. Were it not for her sacrifices, her help, and her commitment to our family, I would not have been able to complete this stage of my education.

ABSTRACT

In recent years the Midway School System in Midway, Tennessee (pseudonyms are used for the town, the school, and the participants in this research), has experienced a significant demographic change that has had both social and academic impacts. An influx of Hispanic students, primarily from Mexico, has brought students who are culturally different and for whom English is not the first language into a school that has traditionally been comprised of almost all white English speaking students. In the era of No Child Left Behind and other large scale educational reforms, this demographic change presents many new challenges to educators in this environment and although standardized test scores are available to track student achievement across certain population groups, rarely do reports or studies focus on the perspectives of teachers. This ethnographic study of teachers at Midway High School focused on teacher perspectives on the population change, how it has impacted their work as educators, and the positive and negative effects of educational reforms in multicultural classroom settings. This study involved observations and interviews of teachers in various content areas and of the school principal. The results highlight many social and academic concerns that are in many ways disregarded by No Child Left Behind and by state-imposed reform efforts implemented in recent years.

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PART 1: HISPANIC POPULATIONS, ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS, AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRENDS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

CHAPTER 1: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1.1: Introduction

The Hispanic population of the United States is increasing rapidly, and with this increase comes a significant change in public education as schools are serving more Hispanic students and English Language Learners (ELLs, students for whom English is not the first language). From 1994 through 2004 there was a sixty-five percent increase in the percentage of English Language Learners enrolled in United States schools, and it is predicted that these students will comprise thirty percent of the student population in this country by 2015 (Fine et al. 2007:77). In some areas of the United States a diverse student population is the norm, but many areas have traditionally served monolingual English speaking students and student populations that lacked cultural (and often racial or ethnic) diversity. This demographic change in public schools presents new challenges for schools both in education and in parent and family communication and involvement. In addition to the challenge of educating linguistically and culturally diverse groups of students, public schools now have the added challenge presented by No Child Left Behind, which requires standardized testing to measure student achievement in mathematics and in English and language arts. Given the current climate of public education in relation to standardized testing and Annual Yearly Progress requirements

according to No Child Left Behind, it is imperative that schools adapt quickly in order to serve the growing population of students for whom English is not the first language.

In the early years of the twentieth century, anthropologists asserted that cultural discontinuity caused the inferior education of minority students. John Ogbu (1982:291) states that as early as 1905 Edgar Hewitt "was criticizing American public schools for failing to understand the cultural backgrounds of children of immigrants. He also criticized schools for not respecting the cultures of the American Indians and of people in the Philippines." Anthropological studies of formal schooling and education began in the 1960s, primarily driven by the desire of anthropologists to refute the "cultural deprivation" hypothesis that had been used to explain the trend of low educational achievement among poor and minority students (Ogbu 1982:291). Ogbu (1982:291) argues that

> minority and poor children are not culturally deprived; nor are they deprived of stimulating learning home environments; instead, minority children do poorly in school because they are provided with culturally different learning environments. Minority children do not acquire the content and style of learning presupposed by curriculum materials and teaching methods encouraged when they enter school.

Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez and James Greenberg (1992:318) characterize these culturally different learning environments as "funds of knowledge" that are not treated equally in school. Ann Roseberry et al. (2001:3) state that "children from middle-class homes, where the funds of knowledge correspond nicely to those of school, experience much less discontinuity." Contrary to the popular idea that common white, middle class American values are the "correct" values and that groups that do not share these values are therefore deprived of culture, anthropologists assert that poor and minority children simply have

different ways of learning and different educational motivations and expectations due to their socioeconomic and cultural differences from the dominant culture. According to Roseberry et al. (2001:1), "this mismatch between children's home cultures and the cultures of schools plays havoc with student achievement."

1.2: No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a standards-based educational reform policy, was signed into law by President George Bush in 2002. Under No Child Left Behind states are required to ensure that all public school teachers are highly qualified and that all schools are meeting academic performance and improvement standards. In addition, public schools must meet goals for student attendance in grades three through eight and high schools must maintain minimum graduation rates. These Annual Yearly Progress goals and standards are monitored and assessed through the administration of standardized tests in Math and English and Language Arts. Under No Child Left Behind, high school students must meet performance benchmarks in these subjects and graduation rates are monitored. According to No Child Left Behind, public school students must all be achieving grade level proficiency in English and mathematics and public schools must have graduation rates of at least ninety percent by 2014.

No Child Left Behind uses the following demographic subgroups in measuring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status: White, Hispanic, African American, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Economically Disadvantaged, Students with Disabilities, and English Language Learners (Tennessee Department of Education

2008c). These subgroups seem arbitrarily and indistinctly defined, as "White" and "African American" are racially or ethnically defined, "Hispanic" and "English Language Learners" are linguistic categories, "Native Americans" is a vague cultural category, "Asian/Pacific Islander" is a regional category, "Economically Disadvantaged" is socioeconomically based, and "Students with Disabilities" is a very broad group. Although these groups problematically conflate class, race, language, and culture and are often difficult to define, these categories are used to identify and compare differential achievement among various groups of students. Despite the problematic nature of these categories, they are widely accepted and used as labels for population subgroups outside of education as well. These categories lack any particular standards or terms of use and can be subjectively and irregularly defined in different regions or even among different schools within regions. However, the use of demographic categories is necessary in order to track and compare the varied populations of schools and districts as well as the often differential levels of achievement among subgroups of school populations.

Traditionally American public schools have seen an "achievement gap" between white students and minority students, with white students consistently performing better academically and graduating at higher rates than racial, cultural, and linguistic minority students. Another component of the "achievement gap" pertains to socioeconomic status, as students of middle class or more affluent families have historically had more academic success than students of poorer families. The goal of No Child Left Behind is to close the achievement gap and to ensure that all public school students in the United States are academically proficient in mathematics, reading, and language arts by 2014. Until then

standardized testing and measures of achievement in those subjects and within the above listed population subgroups will be used to ensure that schools are meeting Adequate Yearly Progress requirements and moving closer to proficiency goals each year.

Schools that do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress standards for one year are labeled "target" schools, and if schools do not meet the standards of achievement for two consecutive years they are labeled "high priority schools." Patricia Gándara and Frances Contreras (2009:49) state that "the schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress have been disproportionately those with large populations of Latino and English learner students." No Child Left Behind identifies schools that have missed a federal benchmark in the same category for two consecutive years, and ultimately, schools that consistently perform poorly will suffer sanctions and students will be given the choice to attend other schools that meet performance standards (Tennessee Department of Education 2008a). No Child Left Behind mandates that students in high priority Title I (high poverty) schools must be allowed to transfer to schools that are meeting targets until their school is no longer designated "high priority." Schools systems must pay for or provide transportation to students who transfer out of high priority Title I schools (Tennessee Department of Education 2008b). Although transportation must be provided to and from school, the school choice provision does not take into account the impracticality of students attending schools that may be far away from their homes. School choice would also require families to remove their students from the familiarity of their communities and may limit students' abilities to participate in academic, social, or athletic extracurricular activities that take place outside of the regular school day. The

provision for public school choice could potentially have other negative consequences as well, for in the event that students are given the option to change schools, public schools will likely become demographically unbalanced even when zoning provides for diversity within districts. As a result, this provision of No Child Left Behind could lead to an increase in socioeconomic (and also very likely racial or ethnic) segregation in public schools.

No Child Left Behind relies on rigid expectations of achievement on standardized tests in order to assess student knowledge and determine whether students are achieving "grade level" competencies. Miguel Guajardo and Francisco Guajardo (2008:15-16) characterize schools under No Child Left Behind as "testing factories" and state that the impact of this legislation has been the creation of a "culture of measurement" rather than a "culture of engagement" in public education. Kris Sloan (2007:26-27) states that the implementation of high-stakes accountability reforms such as No Child Left Behind that rely on standardized testing have resulted in teachers "being viewed as technicians, not professionals." Teachers have in many cases abandoned multifaceted and culturally responsive modes of instruction and replaced them with more directed instruction to target the very specific facts and skill sets that are assessed through standardized tests (Sloan 2007:27). Linda McNeil (2000:202) asserts that not only must teachers "teach to the test," but that the knowledge targeted by proficiency-based curriculum and standardized testing is "oversimplified, fragmented, and sanitized."

Gisela Ernst (1994:323) argues that the use of standardized tests in the assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students is problematic when the interpretation of

scores does not consider the cultural, linguistic, family, and community contexts of students. The higher stakes and expectations of high school students combined with the difficulty experienced by older students in acquiring a new language make this climate of rigid standardized tests particularly difficult for secondary school students to navigate. Sloan (2007:34) states that

> standardized tests have long been characterized as biased against low-income students of color because they are normed, in large measure, based on the knowledge and experiences of middle class whites...educators also maintain that such tests are unfair for learners whose first language is not English because they offer erroneous assessments of what these students know and can do.

In many ways No Child Left Behind has, in measures designed to bridge the achievement gap between white and minority students and to hold schools accountable for academic performance, created more of an obstacle in the education of English Language Learners by requiring more standardized tests and often exit exams for graduation. Michelle Fine et al. (2007:77) state that "the policies of NCLB have actually imposed an inequitable accountability system exclusively based on tests, delimiting possibilities for English Language Learners and minority student achievement, and constricting democratic and pluralistic visions of citizenship and education in this country." Therefore, although the stated goals of No Child Left Behind are valid and very important, the implementation of No Child Left Behind has been undertaken in ways that are actually detrimental to the particular groups it is intended to help (Guisbond and Neill 2004:14; Neill 2006:11; Fine 2007:77; Smyth 2008:135).

1.3: Diversity and Differential Achievement

The differential achievement of students of various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and the common failure of poor and minority students has long been documented as a major challenge to public education (Ogbu 1982:290; Collins 1988:299; Delgado-Gaitan 1988:3; González 1999:432). Katherine Hayes (1992:251) states that "majority group children come to school equipped with the language, culture, and values of the school, and minority group children do not. This has a direct and often negative impact on minority children's school success." Public educational systems have often been described as having a general alignment with the values of the white middle class American, and although much research has been done and methodology developed to address the educational needs of minority students, cultural misunderstandings and misalignment are still common. John Diamond (2004:75) explains that "structural forces, school-level institutional practices, and students' responses to these structures and practices contribute to social reproduction." Through this social reproduction race and class stratification are perpetuated in schools, leading "to the passing on of privilege to the children of the wealthy and whites and to cementing the disadvantages for students from less affluent families and certain students of color" (Diamond 2004:75). As a result of this alignment of curriculum, practices, and expectations with traditionally middle-class white culture, poor and minority students tend to exhibit lower levels of achievement, lower standardized test scores, and behaviors that are not considered acceptable by educators (Osborne 1996:297).

Racial or ethnic, linguistic, and cultural minority students are often seen by educators as over-simplified groups in which all students are seen as having similar backgrounds, behaviors, and levels of educational competence. According to Lauren Young (1998:373),

> knowledge of diverse others is largely constructed from stereotypical images fostered by families, friends, communities, and media. And these images of African Americans and Latinos, for example, significantly reinforce negative beliefs and expectations about student ability and competence. At the same time, white racial privilege is taken for granted and protected.

Martha Montero-Sieburth and Marla Perez (1987:187) also discuss these stereotypes in education, stating that "regular teachers and school administrators have a tendency to see a given minority as monolithic, even when the internal diversity is real and significant." This assumption that all Hispanic students are from the same place and that they all share the same linguistic, cultural, or educational backgrounds not only causes students to feel that they are not appropriately recognized or understood, but also leads educators to mistakenly assume that all these students share the same academic abilities, deficits, and needs. In addition to oversimplifying and stereotyping students, this tendency also ignores the importance of outside influences on minority groups such as the impact of mainstream American culture on Hispanic students (Pollock 2008:371). As is apparent in the approaches of No Child Left Behind and other public education programs and initiatives, the educational system tends to stereotypically categorize students according to socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, or cultural assumptions. The diversity within these groups is seldom acknowledged or understood, often leaving a large gap between what educators think they know about their students and the way students identify themselves.

According to Clayton Hurd (2008:296), No Child Left Behind and other wide ranging reforms have "the consequence of reinforcing more monocultural, class-located norms for schooling as well as condoning a long-standing refusal to acknowledge differences or diversity as a resource."

1.4: The Role of Race in Public Education

Rosemarie Roberts et al. (2008:335) state that "fifty-plus years after the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, public schools in the United States continue to be largely segregated by race and class." This segregation does not only apply to the demographic details of student body populations. The segregation of African American and Latino students can be seen in numerous ways, as schools with high minority populations generally have fewer resources, provide fewer academic opportunities, and have a less rigorous curriculum (Roberts et al. 2008:335). In more integrated schools, segregation is achieved through differential curriculum and tracking systems such as advanced placement courses, honors courses, or special education courses. Angelina Castagno (2008:314) explains that race has a multifaceted significance in public education, stating that

> as much research has shown, race is clearly related to patterned and persistent achievement gaps among students…furthermore, race is central to discussions of normativity, access, and power. In other words, although race is present, it is too often silenced, muted, and ignored within schools. Although many educators insist on ignoring race, they are engulfed in a system in which race structures both how schooling operates and the subsequent outcomes of schooling.

While the dominance of white, middle-class values in the American public school system and in the structure of schools, classrooms, and assessments is well-known and

documented, public schools and educators tend to remain silent about issues of race and of ethnic and cultural differences regardless of the obvious influence these factors have on the education and achievement of diverse students populations. Castagno (2008:319) suggests that this "colormute" behavior of educators, while likely the result of an attempt to be fair to all students, actually serves to reproduce traditional social inequalities.

Colorblindness and colormuteness are common in American society as individuals, particularly white individuals, tend to feel that acknowledgement of race implies racism and that one is racist (Castagno 2008:329). As a result, educators are generally hesitant to discuss race or racial issues with their students, and instead teachers seek to silence these types of discussion. When issues of misunderstanding or tension occur, the unwillingness of educators to discuss concepts of difference with students leads to the perpetuation of the attitude that racial and cultural differences are predetermined and immutable (Hurd 2008:307). This ensures the continued division of students and reinforces the idea that this division is "natural" (Hurd 2008:307). Roberts et al. (2008:337) state that four primary concepts contribute to this perpetuation of racism in schools despite educators' attempts to prove that racism does not exist in schools:

> racism as a system that operates on multiple levels, white supremacy and white privilege as key, although often neglected, aspects of systemic racism, and color blindness as the problematic conflation of race with racism that reinforces inequalities, hierarchies, and racial divisions while insisting that race does not matter.

Hurd (2008:295) states that "colorblindness reaffirms the meritocratic idea in U.S. society that economic and social mobility are possible for all those who will work hard and conform to norms and habits of those already in power." The idea that "hard work"

will result in success is a very common "American" value—but rarely is the existence of white privilege or other social privileges considered. This serves to perpetuate both the privilege and the normalization of the white middle class in public schools, and also the idea that assimilation is the actual key to success in school. Furthermore, Amanda Lewis (2003:33) states that through the attempt to neutralize the concept of race, "color-blindness stigmatizes attempts to raise questions about redressing racial equality in daily life through accusations such as 'playing the race card' or 'identity politics', which imply that someone is trying to bring race in where it does not belong." Thus, students who are not middle class, who are not white, or who are not United States-born must learn to act like students who are in order to achieve academic success. This implies that students' particular minority statuses are not always an important issue. It does not matter whether students are poor, racial minorities, or immigrants—the important thing is that they are not white and of the middle class, and since the educational system is not designed for them, they will have to modify themselves in order to be successful.

1.5: Hispanic Education in the United States

Of educational studies concerning the achievement of Hispanic students, Jeannette Abi-Nader (1990:41) asserts that the literature "reflects a focus on failure and on the cultural, cognitive, or linguistic deficits of minority students" and also states that "Hispanic high school students, especially successful ones, are rarely the objects of research." Research tends to focus on the academic challenges and failure of Hispanic students. While these studies are important, Hispanic and other English Language

Learning high school students have a unique set of experiences and needs that are not always well understood or addressed by educators. Additionally, the cultural context and definitions of academic success and failure are not always clear and success and failure tend to be defined by schools' terms without consideration of student and family perceptions (Delgado-Gaitan 1988:357). For example, Diane Hoffman (1998:334-335) states that "academic achievement and achievement 'motivation'…are highly dependent upon assumptions about the self and its relations to others, including autonomy and styles of social relatedness, and sources of self-esteem." Hoffman (1998:335) offers an explanation of the discrepancy in traditional American educational values and those of Hispanic students stating that as opposed to the commonly accepted and expected individualism and independence valued by Americans, for Hispanic students "the strong wish to nurture parents and other family members, combined with a sense of responsibility and obligation to do so, is a more accurate explanation for the source of achievement motivation." Marcelo Suarez-Orozco and Carola Suarez-Orozco (1993:133) explain that pedagogical practice and curriculum strategies have traditionally been guided by assumptions that are based on the understanding of the motivation of white, middle-class students. Hispanic students, in contrast to the dominant culture, tend to have a world view that is less individualistic and orients the self to others and as a result the academic motivations and goals of Hispanic students cannot be approximated according to the values of the white middle class in the United States. Guadalupe Valdés (1996:170) states that among many Hispanic (particularly Mexican) families, "individual success and accomplishment are generally held in lesser esteem than are people's abilities

to maintain ties across generations and to make an honest living somewhere close to home."

Despite the utility of these cultural understandings, these types of explanations may also contribute to the continuance of stereotypical explanations of the behavior and achievements of Hispanic students and their values, goals, and needs in public education. As Mica Pollock (2008:371) states,

> in education, shallow arguments about culture most often suggest that racialized-ethnic-national origin groups exhibit beliefs, motivations, and practices regarding schooling that they "pass down" from parents to children, as if the racialized-ethnic-national origin group lives together in a bubble or soundproof environment...Such claims are not just stereotypes: they also ignore actors external to the cultures described.

In addition to stereotypical understandings of these students and chronically low expectations of their capabilities, many components of the educational system have been seen to create obstacles to the education of Hispanic students in the United States,. For example, the history of Hispanics in the United States does not often lead these students to see education as a place to succeed or get ahead, for rarely has education resulted in high level employment among this population (Delgado-Gaitan 1988:355). It has been repeatedly documented that Hispanic students are often clustered into lower-level curriculum tracks in schools (Gándara and Contreras 2009:97; Valenzuela 1999:31). This practice is known as "tracking" and generally begins early in students' education in the United States when they have not yet developed as many English language skills as their American-born peers. Valenzuela (1999:31) describes this as a "cultural track" for these students, stating that "ESL honors courses do not exist."

It is much less common for Hispanic high school graduates than for white graduates to attend college or pursue other education after high school. Hispanic students are less likely than white students to enroll in four-year colleges, and they complete bachelor's degrees at less than one-third the rate of white students (Gándara and Contreras 2009:24). Even for students who wish to pursue education beyond high school, navigating the processes of application for admission, scholarships, and financial aid are often complicated and completely unfamiliar to students and their parents. In addition, the cost of tuition is often an obstacle. Guajardo and Guajardo (2008:5) state that communities and educational systems in the United States have a "culture of low expectations regarding Mexican immigrant children going to college. Their place in the community and in the economy [is] clear." For some Hispanic students, attending college is not an option regardless of high school graduation or adequate academic capabilities. Some Hispanic students in the United States are undocumented and for these students there is very little opportunity for education after high school (Guajardo and Guajardo 2008:14). For undocumented students who cannot obtain a status of legal residency in the United States, it is very difficult even to gain entry to many parts of the work force, and the pursuit of post-secondary education is often not possible for these students.

1.6: English as a Second Language in Public Schools

Despite the growing number of English Language Learners in the United States, Gay Washburn (2008:247) states that only 12.5% of teachers have participated in more

than eight hours of training or professional development on how to work with these students. Most mainstream teachers in the United States are not bilingual, and teachers are generally unprepared and lack training in working with students who are English Language Learners (Darder 1995:345; Brisk et al. 2002:3; Batt 2008:41; O'Neal et al. 2008:6; Gándara and Contreras 2009:125). Brenda O'Neal et al. (2008:41) state that more than half of mainstream teachers in the United States work with English Language Learners, but that most of them feel unprepared and that they lack necessary training to work with these students. Today most teachers receive instruction in multicultural education and teaching English Language Learners through one-time workshops and other in-service training, which can only offer superficial attention to these topics (O'Neal et al. 2008:41). Of pre-service education for teachers, O'Neal et al. (2008:11) state that "English language learners are not going away and are rapidly changing how we teach. No Child Left Behind is holding educators accountable for instructing all of our students, but teacher preparation has not kept up with these trends." Since many teachers have little experience in learning a second language, they often do not understand the academic and emotional situations of their English Language Learning students (Batt 2008:42; Washburn 2008:250).

Elizabeth Meador (2005:149) states that programs for English Language Learners "are often devoid of academic content and leave little room for the development of complex literacy skills, intellectual challenge, or critical thinking." Several ethnographic studies and other case studies illustrate this deficiency in English as a Second Language programs. For example, Luis Moll and Stephen Diaz (1987:301) assert that this "practice

of reducing or ‘watering down’ the curriculum" is a major problem in the education of English Language Learners. Montero-Sieburth and Perez (1987:186) characterize the special programs and classes for English Language Learners as a "waiting room" in which students remain until they develop enough English competence to allow them to enter the mainstream classroom. This is due to the fact that these programs, whether in bilingual education or English as a Second Language, are almost always transitional in nature with a "language-as-a-problem" (Freeman 2000:204) orientation in which the minority language is only used until students can sufficiently function through use of the dominant language, English. This tendency leads to a focus on assimilation rather than achievement for these students (Meador 2005:150).

Ernst (1994:320) argues that English as a Second Language programs also often add stress to students by creating complicated schedules and routines at a time when students are already unaware of expectations, confused about procedures, and struggling with the difficulties of communication without English language skills. This time can also be made more difficult for students when educators do not understand the cultural backgrounds of their students. Simple issues of physical proximity, eye contact, and verbal and nonverbal communication with adults, for example, may be regulated by very different cultural rules than those that American teachers understand and often take for granted, and as a result students are often misunderstood. They may be seen as misbehaving or as lacking in skills in speaking or reading simply due to communication and assessment procedures that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable to students. Jo Anne Kleifgen (1988:219) states that failure to recognize or consider these "sociocultural

and/or cognitive elements" can prevent successful instruction of students and hinder student-teacher communication.

Difficulties in communication can create circumstances that are misleading to both students and teachers. According to a case study of an elementary school English Language Learner, Betsy Rymes and Diana Pash (2001:278), "social competence in a second language is more easily accomplished than academic competence. But our research further suggests that academic achievement can actually be *compromised* by social competence." English Language Learners often enter the classroom with very little or no communicative abilities in English and the first task these students have is often that of adapting to the social routines of school. These students may learn to play the part of students, to blend in, and to convince teachers that they understand and are learning. However, the ability to follow the lead of other students and to behave and answer questions adequately can sometimes make students seem like they have developed academic competence when they are actually not learning the intended academic skills. Unwittingly, it seems, social adjustment to school practices and routines sometimes creates a barrier to academic learning, for as students focus on looking like successful students they may fail to learn what is intended and teachers may fail to notice.

The process of language education, primarily among older students, often contradicts traditional educational themes and assumptions. For example, it is well known that conversational practice is vital in learning a second language. However, particularly in secondary schools, there is also a common belief that talk and conversation are in opposition to academic productivity and that if students are talking then they are

most likely not productively working (Olivo 2003:54). The activities provided in English as a Second Language classes and the relationships and communication among students and teachers may be far more informal and social than typical mainstream classroom activities and interactions. Traditional educational ideologies emphasize the need for teachers to control the talk and conversation in their classrooms and excessive or spontaneous talk is often interpreted as indicative of the teacher's lack of classroom management skills or control of the classroom. At the same time, classroom control is often seen as a way in which teachers promote a productive and successful educational atmosphere. These ideologies create difficulties for teachers of English as a Second Language. In large part allowing discussion and practice are vital in order for students to learn English, but this allowance creates both classroom settings and teacher and student roles that are different from those seen in mainstream content area classes. It is therefore difficult for teachers to promote an atmosphere of spontaneous conversation that facilitates the acquisition of language in a traditional educational setting.

Much study has been devoted to determining the amount of time English Language Learners need to develop English proficiency. Most research indicates that "second-language learners often are orally proficient after two years, but need up to seven years to catch up academically and achieve fluency at decontextualized academic tasks like reading for information" (Rymes and Pash 2001:287). For students who have had little or no instruction in their native language, the time needed go gain academic fluency may be extended to ten years (Batt 2008:42). It is suggested that as a result of students achieving oral fluency usually long before reading fluency, many English Language

Learners are incorrectly designated as having learning disabilities or otherwise needing special education services (Rymes and Pash 2001:287). This is seen commonly in public schools, as special education programs and classes often have a disproportionately high number of students for whom English is a second language (Olivo 2003:67). This problem is compounded by the current standardized testing requirements, for "despite the fact that research indicates that it takes students five to seven years to attain the academic English necessary to perform well on standardized tests, a majority of states lack native-language assessments and require that students pass tests in English after two years" (Fine et al. 2007:78).

1.7: Conclusion

According to Moll and Diaz (1987:302), the problems experienced by poor and minority students "must be viewed primarily as a consequence of institutional arrangements that constrain children *and* teachers by not capitalizing fully on their talents, resources, and skills…this conclusion is pedagogically optimistic because it suggests that just as academic failure is socially organized, academic success can be socially arranged." Antonia Darder (1995:320) states that despite decades of reforms and compensatory programs, Hispanic students in the United States are still experiencing difficulties adjusting to the norms and expectations of public schooling. Cultural, linguistic, and often class barriers persist in public education, and

> whether overtly or covertly, intentionally or unintentionally, the cultural standards and norms of the English-speaking culture of the mainstream shape, mold, and influence greatly teacher-student interactions, parent-teacher communication, teacher demands and expectations, the curriculum, instructional approaches, and

> achievement testing, and the system of meritocracy utilized to evaluate and track students through the system (Darder 1995:320)

While many studies explain why Hispanic students traditionally have high dropout rates and low achievement (Valdés 1996:15), many of the studies that highlight successful educational programs for these students were completed before the implementation of No Child Left Behind (Moll and Diaz 1987:301; Abi-Nader 1990:41; Freeman 2000:224). The quantitative measures of differential achievement illustrate a significant and ongoing problem of public education as Hispanic and other minority students still earn lower scores on standardized tests in reading and mathematics than white students (National Center for Education Statistics 2005a:6-7; National Center for Education Statistics 2005b:6-7).

In expressing the importance of ethnographic studies in the current public education system, Angela Valenzuela et al. (2007:7) state that

> there are nuances in teacher pedagogy, curricular instruction, cultures, communities, and political influences. These subtleties cannot be captured in review of broad-based assessment or self-report data. We remain perplexed, however, about what appears at present to be only a handful of qualitative studies examining the effects of federal policy on classrooms, schools, or districts, that serve linguistically, ethnically, economically, and culturally diverse youth.

In addition, according to Lorie Hammond and George Spindler (2001:375), ethnography is "particularly useful in nonmainstream and multicultural settings because so many of the problems that occur there are the result of cross-cultural or cross-class misunderstandings." These problems are evident in public educational policies and in No Child Left Behind, as both educators and educational policy tend to see racial, cultural, or linguistic minorities as monolithic groups without acknowledgement or awareness of

diversity within these groups. More ethnographic study could contribute to the development of teaching methods as well as educational and community programs that will be effective in helping schools to better serve Hispanic students and other diverse student populations in the United States.

PART 2: ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF TEACHERS

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1: Research Objectives

Following my undergraduate studies in anthropology and Romance Languages (Spanish), I worked as a public high school Spanish teacher in North Carolina for three years, from the Fall of 2003 through the Spring of 2006. Added to the challenge of a large and growing population of English Language Learners (primarily Hispanic students), the faculty members were adjusting to the new and rigid requirements of No Child Left Behind during these years. Through my work as a teacher I experienced many of the challenges facing educators in public schools and I also witnessed and practiced some of the successful and unsuccessful methods teachers have used in addressing these challenges.

As a novice teacher I relied heavily on the more experienced teachers for advice on teaching methods and classroom management techniques, and the help I received was an invaluable resource in my classroom as all of the students in my beginning and intermediate Spanish classes were native English speakers. In return I was able to offer help to other teachers in communicating with Hispanic parents that did not speak English, but there was little I could offer to help these teachers in working with English Language Learners in various content areas. Although teachers tried various methods to reach these students and to modify lessons and assignments to make them possible and meaningful learning experiences for these students, there was a definite lack of resources to help

teachers work with the English Language Learners in their classes. There were shortages of materials such as books, bilingual dictionaries, and computers, and there were few bilingual teachers and support staff. These challenges were compounded by the problem of overcrowded classrooms, as classes often had more than thirty students. As a result I watched the Hispanic students at the school remain marginalized both in academics and in extracurricular activities at the school, while the teachers continued to feel that they were "fighting a losing battle" to reach these students and to help these students attain grade level competencies and Annual Yearly Progress goals established by No Child Left Behind.

When I decided to pursue graduate studies in cultural anthropology I left my job as a teacher, but I could not leave behind the love I had developed for teaching and I could not forget the very personal commitments that teachers often make to understanding their students' backgrounds, learning styles, aptitudes, and educational needs. As a result, I combined my work experiences with my academic interests in this thesis research to develop a study of teachers that would illustrate their perspectives on both the current climate of public education in this era of broad-scale "accountability" reform and on the education of diverse student populations and primarily students for whom English is not the first language.

The objective of this study was to discover how public educators adapt to demographically changing student populations and to understand educators' perspectives on the education of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. In this project I hoped to discover the perspectives of teachers regarding the rapidly increasing

number of English Language Learners, particularly Hispanic students, in public schools, for as Ritty Lukose (2008:407) states, "Given that one out of five children attending public school in the United States has an immigrant parent, the ways the educational system deals with this newly immigrant population is of central importance to the anthropology of education in the United States." Public school teachers carry a great deal of the burden of student performance in the era of No Child Left Behind and although much of the literature discusses the failures of teachers and even sometimes the failures of the systems in which these teachers work, in my experience teachers rarely had the opportunity to discuss their experiences, their successes and failures, and their needs. In my experience I found that teachers are often characterized as unaware of or unsympathetic to cultural differences and the obstacles that face students who are not part of the mainstream population (Darder 1995:321), and sometimes I saw this to be true. I think, though, that teachers often do not receive enough credit for how well they actually do know their students and their classes. Teachers spend a great amount of time with children, yet those who create educational policies and even some who develop educational methods and standardized assessments are often far-removed from public school classrooms.

2.2: Research Methods

In this study the primary methods of data collection were observations of classes and interviews of teachers and the principal at Midway High School in Midway, Tennessee (pseudonyms are used for the town, the school, and all participants in this

research). This high school follows a block schedule in which students attend four ninety-minute classes each day. Due to the ninety-minute classes, students complete one set of courses that begin in August and end in December, then complete a second set of courses that begin in January and end in May. My study began in January and was completed in May of 2009. I was introduced to the faculty and staff of the school by the principal, Thomas Reed, during a faculty meeting that was held on the teacher in-service workday prior to the beginning of the Spring semester. At this meeting I explained the objectives of my study, the observation and interview methods I would be using, and invited any interested teachers to participate. Following the meeting several teachers invited me to observe their classes and during the semester I observed and interviewed six teachers and the principal.

In this study I hoped to learn not only how teachers approach the education of English Language Learners, but also if the experiences and challenges that teachers face vary in different content areas. I observed one English class taught by Amy Freeman, one Science class taught by Karen Moore, two Mathematics classes taught by Mark Webb and Nicole Harper, one elective class taught by Stephanie Hereford, and an English as a Second Language class taught by Donna Campbell. The courses I observed included English 10 (tenth grade English), Physical Science, Algebra IB (the second half of a two part Algebra I course), Foundations II (the second half of a two part Pre-Algebra course), Principles of Business, and English as a Second Language Level I. I chose these classes because I was invited to observe by the teachers and also because these classes included students who are English Language Learners. In addition, English 10 and

Algebra I include "Gateway" exams, which students are required to pass in order to graduate. As No Child Left Behind focuses primarily on Mathematics and English and Language Arts, it was very important that I observe courses in these content areas. I also chose a Science course and an elective course so that I could observe a variety of content areas, and I chose English as a Second Language in order to learn about the program and how it serves the English Language Learners as well as to observe these students in a classroom environment by themselves as well as in mainstream classes.

I observed each class for several weeks prior to conducting interviews in order to become familiar with the course content and curriculum as well as the teacher's educational methods and the classroom habits of the teacher and students. In my observations I used a laptop computer to record notes on the classroom activities of the teacher and the students, paying particular attention to the various methods teachers used to teach concepts and to the interactions of teachers and students. In order to protect the privacy of the students, none of my observations were audio or video recorded. My placement in each classroom was based on the teacher's preference, so in some cases I was seated close to or among the students and in others I was seated at a teacher's desk. This did have some effect on the interest and attention I garnered from the students in the classes, but generally my participation in classes was minimal. At times students asked me about the purpose of my work or about the notes I was taking, but otherwise I was not a participant in the classes. I would regularly have informal discussions with the teachers before or after classes or during short "breaks" in classes, and generally at these times teachers would discuss recent events in class or particular situations or students that

proved to be challenging in the classroom. This allowed me to get to know the teachers prior to interviewing them, and also gave a great deal of insight regarding how the teachers assessed their own work in their classrooms.

The interviews I conducted occurred during teacher planning times or after school, and were scheduled at the convenience of each teacher. All interviews were held in the classrooms when students were not present and were audio recorded. Transcriptions of these interviews were incorporated in my field notes. The interviews were generally between one and two hours in length. The teachers that participated in this study had varying levels of experience, from about two years of teaching experience to over twenty years of teaching experience, and some of the teachers had taught in various states and different types of schools (public, private, and religiously affiliated) during their careers. This variety led to an interesting range of perspectives on the education of English Language Learners and students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. I used the same basic interview protocol for all teachers except for the teacher of English as a Second Language and the principal, and I added some different or specific questions for each teacher based on my observations in their classrooms. I found that in only one interview, the interview with the least experienced teacher, did I have to ask nearly all the questions that I had prepared, for most of the teachers were so thorough in their discussion of topics that they often answered questions before I had the opportunity to ask them.

I observed three teachers in January and February, and conducted interviews of these teachers in March. Then in March and April I observed three more teachers and

followed the observations with interviews in May. I also interviewed the principal of the school in May, close to the end of the academic year. Following my research, I compiled my field notes and interview transcriptions and analyzed the data for themes and in relation to my initial research questions.

CHAPTER 3: POPULATION OF STUDY: MIDWAY HIGH SCHOOL

3.1: School Demographics

Midway is located in eastern Tennessee. This town currently has one of the highest percentages of Latinos in the state, and is one of several smaller towns in Tennessee to recently be impacted by a rapid influx of Latin American, primarily Mexican, immigrants (Drever 2006:20-21). According to Anita Drever (2006:32-33), "ethnic change is not sweeping incrementally across Tennessee; rather the Nuevo South is emerging in a few distinct locations. Most Latinos have chosen to settle in Tennessee's two largest cities, yet the places experiencing the greatest proportional shifts are medium-sized towns that are centers of industry or food processing." Low costs of living and available jobs have drawn Latinos to these smaller towns since the 1990s (Striffler 2005:136-137). At first many southerners assumed that the newcomers were migrants, and with the realization that the Latinos were settling permanently in their communities, "the reception that immigrants initially received often turned noticeably cooler" (Striffler 2005:144). Although anti-immigrant sentiments are not universal throughout the South, the lack of federal government assistance has left many communities strained due to new demands in education, transportation, health care, and other areas (Striffler 2005:148).

Historically Midway has had a predominantly white population and has been home to few minorities, so the demographic change caused by the Latino influx has affected Midway and its school system significantly. The Midway area is served by the public Midway School System which consists of three schools: Midway Elementary

School, Midway Middle School, and Midway High School. In the 1999-2000 academic year the Midway School System served 1,913 students in grades Kindergarten through twelfth grade. Of these students 4.3% (83 students) were identified as Hispanic and 4.4% (84 students) were identified as English Language Learners (Tennessee Department of Education 2000). As of the 2007-2008 academic year the number of students served by the Midway School System had increased to 2,101 with 15.9% (346 students) identified as Hispanic and 11.5% (250 students) identified as having limited proficiency in English (Tennessee Department of Education 2008d). The reports published by the Tennessee Department of Education do not indicate how much overlap exists between the Hispanic and English Language Learner categories, and according to the administration of Midway High School, the number of students identified as English Language Learners may change at any time and often changes several times through the course of an academic year.

In less than a decade the population of the Midway School System has undergone dramatic demographic changes with a significant increase in the number of students for whom English is not the first language. This trend has been seen for many years in some regions in the United States and more recently in eastern Tennessee. However, the Midway School System has experienced this change at a much faster rate than other nearby school systems. The population of Midway High School increased from 939 students to 1,151 students from the years 2000 to 2008, and the component of the student body classified as Hispanic grew from 2.9% (27 students) in 2000 to 8.8% (105 students) in 2008 (Tennessee Department of Education 2008c). Prior to this recent influx of non-

English speaking students to Midway High School, the school's population was predominantly composed of white monolingual English speaking students. Administrators, faculty, and guidance counselors are acutely aware of the changing cultural composition of the Midway community and of the student body of Midway High School. What was a decade ago a nearly homogeneous white student body is now still predominantly white but with a rapidly growing population of Hispanic students, and the number of Hispanic students enrolled in the Midway Middle and Elementary Schools indicate that in future years Midway High School will have even more diversity.

3.2: Academic Achievement

Each year the Tennessee Department of Education issues "report cards" that are designed to inform the public, parents, and educators about the performance of public schools. These annual report cards provide information on demographics, academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, school safety and discipline, and teacher quality for each school, each school district, and the state. To gain the status of "highly qualified teacher", a teacher must be fully licensed in the state of Tennessee with no licensure requirements waived (Tennessee Department of Education 2005), although the ability to teach culturally or linguistically diverse students is not part of the "highly qualified" teacher definition according to No Child Left Behind or the state of Tennessee (O'Neal et al. 2008:6).

The Midway High School report card for the 2007-2008 academic year reveals differential levels of achievement for Hispanic and white students. In mathematics 30%

of Hispanic students scored below the proficiency level and 4% of white students scored below the proficiency level. Additionally, 26.1% of Hispanic students scored at the proficiency level and 43.5% scored above, while among white students 31.6% scored at the proficiency level and 64.1% scored above. The differences in reading/language and writing are significant also, as 21% of Hispanic students scored below the proficiency level while only 4% of white students scored below the proficiency level. At proficiency level were 27.3% of Hispanic students and 21.7% of white students, and above proficiency level were 51.9% of Hispanic students and 73.9% of white students. Although these scores do not reveal other information such as the linguistic or educational backgrounds of the students tested or what specific criteria are used in categorizing the students, the scores do show a clear difference in the levels of achievement of various groups, and white students consistently have higher levels of achievement in mathematics and in reading/language and writing than racial or cultural minority students (Tennessee Department of Education 2008c). The number of Hispanic students who are also classified as English Language Learners is not reported, and no test scores are reported for English Language Learners at Midway High School (Tennessee Department of Education 2008c).

According to the state wide report card for Tennessee in the 2007-2008 academic year, 929,543 students are reported with 42, 260 classified as Hispanic (4.8% of the population). The state wide report card also reveals differential levels of achievement for Hispanic and white students. At the high school level among Hispanic students across the state, 11% scored below the proficiency level, 54% scored at the proficiency level,

and 34.7% scored above the proficiency level in mathematics. Among white students only 6% scored below the proficiency level while 40.9% scored at the proficiency level and 52.8% scored above. In reading/language and writing across the state, 15% of Hispanic students scored below the proficiency level while 52.5% scored at the proficiency level and 32.8% scored above the proficiency level. Scores were significantly higher for white students, as 6% scored below the proficiency level, 41.3% scored at the proficiency level, and 52.9% scored above the proficiency level. The percentage of Hispanic students at Midway High School reaching the proficiency level in mathematics and reading/language and writing is lower than the state wide percentage, while the white students at Midway High School have a slightly higher percentage of students reaching the proficiency levels than what is seen at the state level (Tennessee Department of Education 2008e).

3.3: Hispanic Students and English Language Learners

Donna Campbell, the English as a Second Language teacher at Midway High School, is the primary faculty member responsible for communicating with Hispanic students, English Language Learners, and their families. As a result she is the faculty member who has the most knowledge of the Hispanic community in Midway, and she gave me a detailed description of her knowledge of the Hispanic students at Midway High School. According to Campbell, the majority of the Hispanic students and English Language Learners at Midway High School are from Mexico, particularly from the central Mexican state of Guanajuato. Other countries of origin that are represented in the

Hispanic population are Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Puerto Rico, and Peru. Only one Hispanic student is not foreign-born. However, this student was born in Los Angeles, California, but then grew up in Mexico. There is a larger Hispanic population at Midway Elementary School, but many of these students were born in the United States. Campbell reported that about half of the Hispanic students at Midway High School are undocumented immigrants. The students primarily come from agrarian backgrounds and many of the parents of these students are illiterate, so it is often the case that these students are the first in their families to attend high school and will be the first to graduate from high school.

In the early 2000s when the Hispanic population in Midway began growing rapidly, many immigrants sought work at a local mushroom farm. Now many immigrants work in other unskilled sectors, primarily at local food processing and packaging plants or in landscaping, and sometimes in the service industry. The Hispanic immigrants in the area generally stay permanently and are not migratory. However, the students who are in the United States legally often travel back to their home country to visit their hometowns and families, while those who are undocumented do not share this mobility.

Campbell explained that economic hardship is not the only factor that encourages Hispanic families to leave their homes. She stated that the majority of the Hispanic students at Midway High School are from two small towns in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, and the school there only serves students through eighth grade, so pursuit of any education beyond that requires that students go outside their hometowns to attend school.

In some cases students have been out of school for several years before moving to the United States, and there is no guarantee that they have completed eighth grade prior to entering high school in the United States.

Campbell stated that although many students bring their school identification cards from their home countries, most of them do not have transcripts or records from their prior education. She stated that students tend to lack the academic skills of their American peers, and that their skills in mathematics are often particularly weak and in her opinion there often appear to be previously unaddressed special education needs. At Midway High School there is a three year minimum residency in the United States before a student can be tested or classified as an "exceptional child" or one in need of "special education." This is intended to keep students from being placed in special education due to a language deficiency rather than actual special educational needs. However, Rymes and Pash (2001:287) assert that three years may not be enough time for English Language Learning students to develop reading fluency, even in cases where oral fluency has been achieved.

In discussing the extracurricular participation of Hispanic students, Campbell stated that about half of the boy's soccer team was comprised of Hispanic students, but that the Hispanic students generally do not participate in other sports or extracurricular activities. Although some teachers have attempted to recruit Hispanic students for other sports teams, for clubs, and for organizations such as the Yearbook Staff, there is very little Hispanic participation in activities at Midway High School. Gándara and Contreras (2009:114-115) assert that this non-participation is common among Hispanic students in

the United States and may be due to reasons such as cost of activities, lack of transportation, employment or other responsibilities, and feelings of marginalization in school.

Campbell reported that the Hispanic students at Midway High School tend to have lower educational aspirations than many of their American peers. According to Campbell, it is very difficult to encourage Hispanic students to stay in school, particularly undocumented students. For undocumented students most of the work that will be available to them is manual labor, and earning a high school diploma often does not seem worthwhile to these students as they will have to obtain false identifications in order to gain employment at all. Campbell states that she encourages the Hispanic students to pursue education after high school, but that traditionally it is not expected in most Hispanic immigrant families in this community.

PART 3: RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 4: INTRODUCTION

The primary objectives of this study were to discover how the teachers of Midway High School have adjusted to the increasing diversity in the student population, primarily the influx of Hispanic students who are English Language Learners, and how this population change and recent federal and state educational reforms were affecting their experiences in the classroom. I hoped to discover what challenges teachers faced, and what successes and failures they experienced in educating students who are linguistically and culturally different in an environment of accountability reforms and more and more implementation of high stakes testing. I also hoped to discover what resources are needed in order to more successfully educate these students in the era of No Child Left Behind and other broad scale educational reforms.

During my observations and interviews, several primary themes became evident. Many of these related to my initial research questions, such as teacher attitudes concerning the academic habits of Hispanic students, the resources that teachers need in order to be more successful, and teacher opinions on No Child Left Behind and Tennessee Department of Education reforms. However, two major themes arose in my observations that I did not expect prior to beginning this study. The first was the segregation of Hispanic students from the rest of the student body. I observed and heard from teachers that there was very little social or academic mixing of Hispanic students with non-Hispanic students. This segregation seemed to be self-induced, and although some teachers found it troublesome, others saw it as natural. The other theme that I did

not anticipate in the development of my initial research questions was that of racism or discrimination. I witnessed racist remarks of white students concerning Hispanics as well as other minority groups, and was surprised to see that discriminatory statements often went ignored in classrooms. As I saw these issues on a daily basis in every class that I observed, I included these topics in my interviews with teachers. I received a wide variety of responses to these topics, responses which gave great insight concerning the social and cultural attitudes and expectations of teachers in this increasingly diverse school environment.

CHAPTER 5: HISPANIC ACADEMIC HABITS

5.1: Language Barrier

In discussing the academic habits, strengths, and weaknesses of English Language Learning students at Midway High School, teachers expressed many similar concerns across content areas. All of the teachers expressed that the language barrier is a constant but unavoidable hindrance to ELL student performance in class and on assessments. This language barrier is not simply significant because it affects students' understanding of course vocabulary, class instructions, and their ability to perform well on assignments and other assessments. The language barrier also limits the amount of communication possible between ELL students and teachers, and most teachers feel that it inhibits the willingness of these students to ask questions or to request help when they do not understand course content or instructions. The language barrier creates a situation in which students with limited English proficiency become dependent on students who are capable in both English and Spanish, as most teachers are not bilingual.

Several teachers stated that the ELL students in their classes are very hesitant to ask them for help, or to speak up when they do not understand the concepts taught in class or instructions for assignments. The teachers primarily attributed this to the lack of English language skills and to a hesitance to attempt to speak English. The teachers did not generally assume that the ELL students lack academic capabilities, but that language deficiencies are an inevitable hindrance to learning for these students. Math teacher Nicole Harper stated that "they can do the math, you know, numbers are always the same

no matter what language you're in, but the definition of something has really been a struggle." English teacher Amy Freeman stated that "I don't know if it's a cultural thing or if they're just embarrassed but often times I feel like when they're struggling I'm having to pull it out of them, they don't let me know." Other than the English as a Second Language teacher, the two foreign language teachers, and two staff members who work as translators and tutors as needed (one is a full-time employee and one works part-time), the members of the faculty at Midway High School are monolingual English speakers, and although some know a few terms and phrases in Spanish, they do not have functional Spanish language capabilities. As a result, the ELL students with limited English speaking and reading capabilities often must rely on the more bilingually capable students in their classes to help bridge the language barrier. Teachers must in many cases rely on these students as well to relay information and instructions, as there are only two staff translators and these individuals must visit several classrooms and also aid in communication with parents, so they cannot often devote consistent or significant amounts of time to individual classrooms or students.

5.2: Attendance

Teachers commonly expressed concern about the tendency of some families of English Language Learners to leave town for extended periods of time, causing extended absences that make it difficult for students to complete courses. At Midway High School this tendency seems to be most common among Mexican families who have come to the

United States legally and therefore have border crossing mobility, a luxury that illegal immigrant families do not possess.

Attendance is sometimes a significant concern among Hispanic students at Midway High School. Business teacher Stephanie Hereford stated that "they'll leave, and they'll tell us they will be gone. They'll be gone for a month, six weeks, then all of a sudden they're back. We need to make sure that the parents understand that the continuity of our education, the way we do things, they have to stay. And I don't know enough about their culture to know how to deal with that. But that's very difficult for them and for us as teachers." As previously noted, English as a Second Language teacher Campbell explained that this practice of leaving for extended periods of time is mostly limited to students who are legally in the United States, and this return to students' home countries may sometimes be due to the requirements for visa renewals. She estimated that nearly half of the Hispanic students at the school are undocumented and therefore are unable to return to their home countries. Students who leave for their home countries generally miss several weeks of school, and sometimes are gone during end of course exams. If they do return in time for exams, they have often missed the equivalent of months of school due to the block schedule, therefore making it nearly impossible for them to catch up on work or learn all the curriculum concepts necessary to pass end of course exams. Principal Thomas Reed stated that aside from the occasional long term absences among the Hispanic students, the Hispanic attendance is generally good and "when we recognize students with perfect attendance the majority of them will be Hispanic students."

5.3: Academic Habits

Perhaps the most interesting trend in teachers' characterizations of the English Language Learning students at Midway High School is their very idealized view of the work ethic and educational values of these students. The teachers tend to see their Hispanic students, both those who are proficient in English and those who are still in English as a Second Language courses, as having a better work ethic than their American-born counterparts. They mention that the Hispanic students are behaviorally less problematic than many of the American students, and that they are more respectful of authority. Science teacher Karen Moore stated that "they're very polite! Oh, I love these kids! They tend to exhibit a higher level of politeness, sometimes to the degree that they don't really say much when they don't understand. Obviously in Mexico teachers are held in much higher regard than they are here! American students, now, assume you're stupid. Apparently our south of the border students hold us in some regard at least, and it's rather refreshing I might add!" Regarding their academic habits and dedication, math teacher Mark Webb said, "I think the overall attitude is toward trying to achieve through school. Some of my best kids have been Hispanic kids. They get their work done, it's usually well written, I don't have sloppy work coming from them. I think that they value their education, they value the opportunity." Business teacher Hereford shared this perception of the Hispanic students, saying, "I'm proud of them because they've worked so very very hard yet they seem to always want to pull back and not be noticed, but they're some of my best workers. But you know I have these feelings about my Hispanic students. They

work so hard and they're so diligent in getting work completed." I was surprised that so many of the teachers responded to my questions about the academic habits of the Hispanic students with such emotion and affection, as I did not expect such an idealized view of teenagers to be so consistently expressed by teachers across various content areas.

During my observations of the English as a Second Language and the other classes at Midway High School, I noticed several interesting behavioral trends among the students. In mainstream classes I noticed that Hispanic students tended to socialize with one another and sit together when teachers did not assign seating arrangements. These students rarely took seats in the front or middle of their classrooms, but instead usually took desks along the back and outside rows. Students who were verbally very proficient in English tended to socially mingle with non-Hispanic students more than those who had less English proficiency and were still in English as a Second Language classes. Students who were still classified as English Language Learners (had not yet completed all levels of ESL classes or demonstrated adequate proficiency to be removed from the English as a Second Language program) tended to be less visible in classes. They were quieter than the other students, more removed from the majority of the class, and generally only communicated with other Hispanic students in Spanish, rarely willingly making contact with non-Hispanic students or teachers. These students generally would not speak up in class unless called upon by the teacher to answer a question or perform a task, and they almost always appeared to be working quietly and diligently without being disruptive to others or calling attention to themselves. Meanwhile the white students in these classes

usually interacted much more frequently and willingly with the teachers, and they were more likely to be reprimanded for excessive socializing or for not focusing on assignments.

I observed very different behavioral patterns among these students in the English as a Second Language classroom. In this classroom students felt free to mingle and socialize before the bell rang for class to start. The students joked with one another, often in Spanish until the teacher would remind them that they should only be using English in their conversations (this is a classroom expectation that she upheld in the hopes that it would promote more language practice). At the beginning of class, sometimes students would have to be reminded to take their seats and prepare for lessons and activities. Some would mention that they had forgotten their pencils. Sometimes they would even express their distaste for the idea of having assignments to do that day. Students felt free to ask questions and to answer questions posed by the teacher, and did not at all exhibit the same meek demeanor that I had seen in my observations of their other classes. In the English as a Second Language classes, only the English Language Learning students were present. They were all Hispanic, native Spanish speakers. In this isolated environment these students seemed much more relaxed and comfortable, and much more outgoing. Similar behaviors are noted in Kay Losey's (1995:293) discussion of McClure's 1978 study in which Mexican American students were less likely to participate in mainstream classrooms and more likely to respond to questions and voluntarily participate in bilingual classrooms. Losey (1995:293) states that this study illustrates a trend of Hispanic students behaving "much like Anglo students when they are in the

context of a bilingual classroom, where they apparently feel more at ease," and in this study, like at Midway High School, the bilingual teacher was a white woman from the United States.

The perception that the English as a Second Language teacher, Campbell, has of the Hispanic students at Midway High School was very different from that expressed by teachers in mainstream classrooms. She stated that "it took me, and I'm embarrassed by this, but my first year here was one of the most disappointing school years I've ever had professionally. I came into this thinking, 'Oh, everyone wants to learn English, they all know it's their way to succeed. They're all hungry to learn the English language!'." Campbell expected that her students would be dedicated and diligent in their study of English, and she was surprised at the reality of her experience as an English as a Second Language teacher. In contrast to the opinions of the other teachers, Campbell said that the Hispanic students are "just like teenagers all over the world. They're lazy and they're disrespectful, and they don't want to work, and they forget stuff. I mean there's that end, but there's the want to please the teacher, study every night end also."

After my observations of the English as a Second Language classes and my interview with Campbell, I began to reconsider the statements of the mainstream classroom teachers. I noticed that in Campbell's classroom the students were more comfortable, animated, and communicative than they tended to be in their mainstream courses. However, it also became evident that Campbell had begun teaching these students with the same expectations that the mainstream teachers had and still maintained. She knows the Hispanic population of the school much more personally than

other faculty or than members of administration, as she is one of very few individuals in the school system who can communicate with these students' families and she is the first member of the faculty to really communicate and establish relationships with English Language Learning students when they are new to the school system. The vision she had of how the students would be, and the vision that many teachers at Midway High School still have, is very reflective of the American stereotype of Mexicans as "hard workers" (Wortham et al. 2009:389-390). Hispanic immigrants in the United States are often characterized as harder working than their American counterparts, and by leaving their homes, coming to the United States, and working so tirelessly they are often seen as pursuing the "American Dream (Wortham 2009:393). Given the persistence of this stereotype, it is relatively unsurprising that American teachers would assume that their Hispanic immigrant students would strongly value education and would be driven to succeed educationally as they are simply the younger generation living out this same "American Dream."

5.4: Academic Goals

Although the teachers generally seemed to believe that the Hispanic students at Midway High School aspire to do well in school, few addressed the issue of education for these students beyond high school. According to the teachers and principal, currently few of the Hispanic students go on to college after graduation, though in recent years a few have enrolled in local community colleges. Those who do pursue any education after high school are almost always male.

English teacher Freeman stated, "Now my girls, a lot of my Hispanic girls, they want to graduate from high school but they have mentioned no desire to go to college." In her class students were required to do library and internet research and to write essays on careers they would like to have, and none of the Hispanic girls chose careers that require college degrees. The Hispanic boys in the class, on the other hand, chose careers that do require college degrees such as "police officer" or "Spanish teacher." In response to this Freeman stated, "I don't know if it's cultural. I mean, I know that Hispanic women go to college! I know this! But I don't know if it's from this area that they're from, maybe it's from their families."

Several factors that affect the educational opportunities for Hispanic students beyond high school are very evident. For example, many of the Hispanic students at Midway High School are undocumented immigrants. The teachers feel that these students lack eligibility for college and their legal status in the United States makes a high school diploma seem less important to these teenagers. English as a Second Language teacher Campbell stated, "I have a hard time knowing how to encourage my undocumented students who are graduating. I don't know what to tell them, because there is no place for them. College isn't an option and working is their option but that means that they get a fake ID. And it's hard to encourage them to do anything besides simple manual labor."

Campbell encouraged Hispanic students who were seniors to consider community college or four year universities after high school. In addition she often helped students with applications and campus visits, as she realized that Hispanic parents, having not

been educated in the United States, often do not know what opportunities are available for their children or how to navigate the admissions and financial aid application processes. Valdés (1996:155) asserts that this unfamiliarity and lack of understanding of the American education system is common among Hispanic families. Valenzuela (1999:151) also notes that Hispanic students sometimes do not make correlations between the courses they are taking and careers they hope to attain, and that although Hispanic students seem to be aware that a college degree is valuable, these students are often "insufficiently socialized into an understanding of the tools and knowledge they would need to reach such a goal."

In the Spring of 2009 Campbell took two Hispanic girls to a four year college for interviews. However, she doubted that the girls would decide to attend college. She explained that the reason she so strongly encouraged these two particular girls to pursue education after high school was because of the eleven Hispanic girls who would be graduating in the Spring of 2009, these two were the only ones who did not already have children. Campbell asserted that in addition to often having children prior to graduating high school, the girls in Hispanic families in this community often do not learn how to drive, and rarely consider leaving their homes and families after graduation. According to Campbell, "They all want to go to beauty school. And I know the world needs Spanish speaking beauticians but again, you know, that's the safe choice. You know, that's what you do in Mexico. And if I can just get them to think, 'oh, I don't need to be a beautician, I can be a mathematician'. It's hard, it's hard to change tradition."

CHAPTER 6: THE (SELF) SEGREGATION OF HISPANIC STUDENTS AND THEIR DEPENDENCE ON ONE ANOTHER IN SCHOOL

The teachers at Midway High School acknowledged that the ELL and other Hispanic students tended to remain in isolated groups from the rest of the student body. In the halls I observed that the Hispanic students generally congregated in certain areas, they usually ate lunch together, and in classes they normally sat together and did any cooperative work together unless they were assigned to sit elsewhere or work with other students. Some teachers did not mind this, others saw it as unavoidable, and some saw it as a problem.

In some cases teachers have little choice but to allow ELL students to depend on their bilingually capable classmates, for these students are sometimes the only way teachers can communicate to ELL students with very limited English proficiency. For example, science teacher Moore mentioned that she is happy to allow bilingual students to help those who are still learning English, for she feels that this is the best resource she has to help these students. Math teacher Webb stated that "here, the Hispanic kids tend to congregate by themselves. I think they feel more comfortable doing that than if I were to split them up and try to integrate them into the classroom. If they take that posture in the hallway that's very public and everybody kind of knows that so to have them sitting in a portion of the room where they can help each other, I think they like that."

Other teachers had misgivings about these students developing such habits of co-dependence. English teacher Freeman said that she wants the Hispanic students to get to know other students, and she wants the American-born students to get to know their

Hispanic classmates. She also articulated the concern that she does not want to seem like she is segregating her students. Unlike many teachers that I observed, Freeman assigned seating and changed seating arrangements frequently in order to make students work with a variety of classmates and in order to prevent dependent relationships from developing among students.

Business teacher Hereford, English as a Second Language teacher Campbell, and principal Reed saw the self segregation of Hispanic students as problematic in many ways. Although Hereford encouraged cooperative work among white and Hispanic students, she stated that "They seem to want to group together with their own language and they'll revert back to Spanish so quickly. And I know there's a comfort zone in that. It makes me very sad to see that they feel like they would be possibly not welcome or not smart enough to be with the other kids." Campbell agreed with this, stating that "I think a real disability and a hindrance for all of them is that they speak Spanish with each other. And I mean, it's very hard for me to enforce their speaking English with each other, especially outside of the classroom. But I say to them, 'well, you have to start thinking in English and using it all the time!'." In addition to these concerns, Reed added another consideration that the teachers did not mention with regards to the bilingually capable students. He stated that "I know from talking to some of the Hispanic students who do a good job and who speak good English, I think often times they don't like having to tutor or help others because it makes them worry that they might get behind in their own work." American-born students do not have to take on this responsibility, but almost

every bilingually capable Hispanic student at Midway High School at some point in their daily routine must act as liaison or translator or tutor for his or her ELL classmates.

CHAPTER 7: RESOURCES AND MODIFICATIONS TEACHERS NEED

In my observation of classes in many content areas at Midway High School, I saw teachers employ various modifications in order to accommodate English Language Learners in their classes. In many cases teachers used trial and error to determine what types of modifications are useful and which are not, and in what cases certain modifications work. All teachers based their educational and assessment modifications on individual student abilities and needs, so although teachers have found many techniques that work to help ELL students, they have found no universal solution to the challenges faced by these students.

In standardized testing, ELL students have some set modifications and allowances. For example, in mathematics all parts of End of Course Exams can be read aloud to ELL students. However, not all parts of the exams in Language Arts can be read aloud. ELL students are allowed one and one half the amount of time that students in the mainstream population are allowed to take the exams. Aside from standardized tests such as the End of Course Exams, teachers are allowed to choose the types of assessments they use and they may modify them according to their own discretion. Some teachers modified assessments by removing or shortening portions of tests they gave in classes such as those that involve extensive reading or vocabulary, or by allowing students to re-take tests if they did not do well on them. Others used slightly different grading scales or rubrics for ELL students—such as giving lesser or no penalties for spelling and grammatical errors in humanities courses or for word problems in mathematics or science courses. Some teachers encouraged the use of Spanish-English dictionaries. In classes

with higher numbers of Hispanic students, particularly when many of them were still classified as ELLs, teachers usually wrote more key vocabulary on the board and used more repetition in their presentation of new concepts. Some textbook publishers provide workbooks and other auxiliary materials in Spanish, and teachers expressed mixed feelings about these. Math teacher Webb did not use any materials published in Spanish as he saw these materials as a crutch that will hinder the students' development of skills in English. Math teacher Harper used them sometimes and has had some success with them. Science teacher Moore has offered these materials to her students in the past but students have stated that they do not need or want them. Teachers mentioned that the Hispanic ELL students often lack reading proficiency in Spanish, so materials that are written in Spanish prove unhelpful to these students. Midway High School does not currently offer classes in Spanish for native speakers, and the focus lies mostly in developing literacy skills in English, not in students' native language.

In most cases teachers felt that the resources they have are adequate for the courses they teach. The only classroom that seemed inappropriately equipped was Moore's Physical Science classroom, which was small and lacked any of the facilities of a normal laboratory classroom. The school does not have enough laboratory classrooms to accommodate all the courses that need them, thus limiting the laboratory activities that Moore could perform with her students. In general the teachers seemed to feel like classroom technology is adequate and textbooks are adequate, while more calculators and other student supplies could always be useful.

In contrast to the variability in modifications and teaching methods used to help ELL students in different content areas, the teachers tended to agree on what resources are needed to make working with these students more successful. Every teacher that I observed and interviewed stated that classes are far too large to adequately allow for the individualized education that ELL students and many other students need. Most classes have between thirty and thirty-five students, making it difficult for teachers to spend time with individual students.

Midway High School has a "peer tutor" program, in which more advanced students are assigned to particular classes to provide help to teachers. Students chosen to act as peer tutors are usually upper classmen, and they are assigned to work in classes that they have already taken and in which they excelled. For example, Webb's Algebra IB class had thirty-four students and two peer tutors. One of the peer tutors was Hispanic and therefore could help communicate with the eight ELL students in the class. These two peer tutors could also work individually with students in class, therefore helping Webb provide more one-on-one instruction. However, not all classes have peer tutors, so in many cases teachers with the same number of students in a class have no assistance. The school also has one full-time translator and one part-time translator who are not assigned to particular classes but who move from class to class in order to give help as needed. They also often help teachers who need to communicate with Spanish speaking parents. I observed that one translator came to Freeman's English 10 class twice a week to work with the ELL and some other Hispanic students. This translator would usually take the students to another classroom to work on assignments such as reading

comprehension, vocabulary, or sometimes quizzes and class tests, which she would read aloud to the students. Although these translators are not certified teachers and their availability was limited due to their many responsibilities, the teachers of Midway High School generally seemed pleased with the help they received from translators.

In discussing class size, math teacher Webb stated, "With a large class you're probably going to have a wide range of abilities and it's very difficult to address the needs of the top and the bottom at the same time." Math teacher Harper added that "if the students are higher achievers, accelerated kids, a big class is fine because they're self learners. And you put one thing on the board and they're going to remember it until next year. But if you're dealing with a regular ed classroom you need a lot smaller classes because they need one on one help." For the ELL students, English as a Second Language teacher Campbell stated that "if I could have resources, it would be more help in other classes for the students. And more help for the other teachers, and I don't mean more training. I think some of the teachers need a little bit more training in just how low these ELL kids are and in how much repetition you have to do. But the thing is, it's very hard to attend to a group of ELL kids and a group of regular kids, especially if there are thirty-five of them." Principal Reed saw the high ratio of students to teachers as one of the greatest hindrances to student and teacher success, as having up to thirty-five students in a class with only one teacher "makes it difficult in the best of situations and now the standards have been increased. The bar continues to be raised but there aren't any safety nets being provided."

CHAPTER 8: CULTURE, RACE, AND RACISM

The Midway School System has been traditionally almost entirely white, with very few minorities until the influx of the Hispanic population into the area. Race and racism are very sensitive topics in public schools, and at Midway High School I found that although some teachers seemed to be very aware of racial and cultural relations among students, most were unsure of how to discuss these issues and very hesitant to even acknowledge them. In general, it appears that since no racially motivated fights have occurred among students, teachers and administrators are satisfied to characterize relations among students as "good" despite clear divisions between white and Hispanic students at the school.

During my observations I sometimes saw that racist statements made by students were not acknowledged by teachers. For example, in one class the students read a short biography of poet Langston Hughes prior to studying one of his poems. The biographical information stated that Hughes came from a family of "abolitionists", and the teacher asked her students if they knew what abolitionists were. One student said, "They were people who didn't like slavery." The teacher confirmed this and added, "They were people who fought to end slavery." After this exchange another student said, "I don't like those people," and smiled and looked around to his classmates for approval. There were no African American students in this class, and there was little reaction to the student's statement by his classmates. The teacher ignored the statement, which was audible to the class, and then continued with the reading of the poem.

Another case in which a racist statement was ignored occurred in a different class. Due to cooperative group work, two Hispanic students had traded seats. The teacher knew where Carlos and Jorge normally sat, so when she peripherally saw a student with his hand raised to ask a question, she said, "I'll be right there, Carlos," not realizing that Jorge was in that seat. A moment later when she turned around to address the student, she realized that the boys had traded places and apologized to Jorge for calling him by his classmate's name, and reiterated that she had not forgotten his name. A white student two seats away sarcastically stated, "It doesn't matter, they all look the same anyway," implying that he believed it to be true. Again, a racist statement went without acknowledgement from the teacher.

In my interviews I found that the teachers and principal of Midway High School most often use the word "culture" to describe differences between the Hispanic and white students at the school. Some teachers commonly referred to United States born students as "our kids" while referring to the Hispanic students as a separate group, clearly showing an awareness of the difference and a more distant connection with the Hispanic students than the mainstream group. Despite the seeming awareness of divisions in the school population between United States-born students and Hispanic students, teachers were very hesitant to discuss these issues and were very careful about every statement. Only two teachers would even use the term "racial" in discussing the relationships among groups of students. It seemed evident that acknowledging the division between United States-born white students and Hispanic students was already difficult for the faculty and

administration of Midway High School, and teachers were careful to avoid characterizing any divisions or tension as racially motivated.

It is evident that the administration is aware of the change that has happened in the student population in recent years. Science teacher Moore, who began teaching at Midway High School in the Fall of 2008, stated, "When I was hired, there was some inquiry as to my attitudes. I could tell from the questioning when I was hired. They wanted to make sure that I didn't have an attitude about teaching minorities or people who were different, of a different culture. And I thought that was good, because surprisingly enough, occasionally, you run across people who aren't thinking about things very well." This concern from the administration in the hiring of new faculty may relate to the community in general, as English teacher Freeman explained that most of the Midway community was Southern Baptist prior to the influx of Hispanics who are often Catholic, stating that this religious difference was "a new thing for them to deal with." She continued, "Some of them [in the community] are closed minded. And it's not all of them but enough of them. But you get that in any small southern town I think." Freeman was careful to explain that Hispanic people were not necessarily welcomed or well liked by the native population of Midway, but was very hesitant to offer any criticism or to directly acknowledge discrimination or racism.

I heard some contradictory statements regarding the relations between United States born students and Hispanic students. Teachers readily acknowledged that the two groups generally self-segregate in the hallways, at lunch, and during class when it is allowed. One teacher stated, "I think there is a huge division. And I think the kids that

are not Hispanic that started hanging out with the Hispanic kids, tend to be kids that are hanging out with them due to drugs or gangs. I don't think they are necessarily 'hey, you're my best friend' kinds of buddies. It doesn't seem like they get along. It doesn't seem like they mesh, or mix, their friends. In the morning they stand in a certain spot. They hang out with certain groups. The Hispanic kids that are mixing [among the white students] are the kids that have been in our system since elementary school." According to this teacher the Hispanic students who have spent more years in the Midway School System tend to be the only ones who are socially involved outside of the Hispanic group. No other teacher suggested that drug or gang activity might draw some Hispanic and white students together. However, most would readily admit and it was evident in my observations that the Hispanic students have certain areas of the school where they congregate before, after, and between classes and that the Hispanic students do not often socialize with students outside that group.

English as a Second Language teacher Campbell described any discrimination among students as "not very overt," stating that she did not know of any racial fights occurring in her years as a member of the faculty. Despite this statement, she then admitted to hearing of overtly discriminatory statements toward Hispanic students, saying that students in her English as a Second Language classes sometimes told her that in the hallway they were called "wetbacks" or were told to "go back where you came from, we don't want any Mexicans here." She directly followed that admission by saying, "You know, in my little ivory tower, I would characterize relations as good, but I'm a middle class white woman."

Business teacher Hereford mentioned that she often hears "undertones of racial and hurtful remarks." She explained that students often made remarks that are commonly made about Hispanics in the United States, for example, that Hispanics come to the United States and "take our jobs." Hereford attributed many of these comments to the families of students, saying that the community has been historically white and lacked diversity until recent years and that the children are most likely repeating things they hear from their parents or others at home. Although she emphasized how unfounded and hurtful these comments are, and that she would never tolerate these remarks in her classroom, she also made sure to remind me that the people of the community "are really good people."

Principal Reed characterized the tendency of students to segregate into Hispanic and non-Hispanic groups as comparable to the way in which student athletes and members of the marching band comprise separate social groups. He stated, "I think for the most part our kids get along with each other. I don't think there's much tension among the student body. Now there's some. But I think our kids coexist quite well together. And that's something that we're conscious of and something that we're trying to promote even more. We're hanging a mural in the upstairs area talking about where our kids come from and we coexist here and once you're here you're a Midway High School Panther, you're not from Puerto Rico or from Canada, you're here, and you're part of this family now." In my observations at Midway High School I saw attempts by the teachers and administration to integrate the culturally different portions of the student body at times although the students were sometimes allowed to self segregate as well,

and in order to avoid or possibly ignore conflict and differential treatment of students based on their cultural, linguistic, or racial backgrounds, a "colorblind" and somewhat of a "melting pot" mentality is being fostered as a response to increasing student diversity.

CHAPTER 9: PERSPECTIVES ON NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM

In recent years sweeping reform policies have been put in effect by the federal government and by state governments. In Tennessee, No Child Left Behind has been followed by state-implemented policies regarding curriculum, assessments, standardized testing, and graduation requirements. These federal and state reforms have greatly impacted the content of courses at Midway High School as well as assessments of student proficiency and the standards that must be met in order for students to graduate. The teachers involved in this study had many opinions about these recent changes in the public education system, and most teachers expressed similar sentiments regarding positive and negative aspects of these reforms and the effects that they have on their jobs and on the education of their students.

The teachers and principal of Midway High School gave many positive comments regarding No Child Left Behind and recent reforms and changes implemented by the Tennessee Department of Education. The teachers agreed that standardizing of both teacher and student accountability should eventually have a positive impact on education, as schools across the country should ideally be teaching the same information and students should be meeting the same standards in order to pass particular courses and in order to graduate high school. Math teacher Webb stated, "I think accountability is a good idea, because I think if you don't test at all, you're just taking a hope that people are going to work and hope that somebody's going to teach and hope that somebody's going to care." English as a Second Language teacher Campbell also mentioned that "No Child

Left Behind has done a good job putting the spotlight on some groups of kids who maybe weren't getting attention...and I think it's made teachers more aware of the needs of special ed and ESL populations." In addition to this goal of closing the achievement gap, principal Reed considered student retention and the lowering of dropout rates an important component of educational reform. He stated that "we have kept kids in school that we probably wouldn't have a few years ago. We would have cut them loose, and that's not good either...so let's keep them in school, let's give them every chance we can. A lot of times if we weren't pushing them there wouldn't be anybody else pushing them and they're just not equipped to make that decision that they don't need school." Reed and many teachers mentioned that part of educational reform should involve more challenging curriculum for students, and that in the past many standardized assessments have been "watered down" and students and educators have "been very good at meeting low expectations."

Although the teachers and administrators at Midway High School generally agreed that the goals of No Child Left Behind and other recent reforms are valid, they offered many criticisms of the manner in which reforms are implemented. These criticisms involve curriculum, assessment methods, and other components of reform that teachers find unfair or unrealistic. Although the principal and many teachers stated that in the past students were sometimes not challenged enough, after recent changes many teachers stated that individual course curriculum outlines are unrealistic and involve more standards than can be met. Another common concern involved the change in graduation requirements implemented by the state of Tennessee that now require students to

complete courses in chemistry and mathematics beyond second level algebra in order to graduate. In reference to increased course requirements for graduation, science teacher Moore stated, "What I don't quite agree with is the scope of it...to say to every single freshman next year, 'You have to pass chemistry to get a high school diploma,' I think this is a very unrealistic expectation." A similar sentiment was expressed by business teacher Hereford, "They're lofty goals. I'm not sure that all of our children need to take chemistry. From what I hear from the science and math teachers, some of it's not feasible especially in a setting like this." The teachers do not characterize their students as unintelligent or incapable, but they do share the concern that students will either fail to learn important basic skills because they are inappropriately thrust into higher level courses than are practical, or that the curriculum and expectations for achievement in these higher level courses will be decreased in order for students to earn the required graduation credits.

At first I was somewhat surprised that teacher expectations of student achievement seemed so low. However, as I observed classes I realized that the trouble does not lie in low teacher expectations or in low student capabilities, but I found that teachers are concerned due to many basic skills that are glossed over and underdeveloped in the race to make sure that all children can pass standardized exams in high level courses. For example, I observed Harper's pre-algebra class, called "Foundations" at Midway High School. Ideally students should have completed this level of mathematics in middle school, but many students have not by ninth grade. Due to new graduation requirements, however, the Foundations course will no longer be offered after the Spring

2009 semester. In order to earn four credits in mathematics in high school, and to complete one level of mathematics above Algebra II, all students will begin in a mathematics course no lower than Algebra I beginning in Fall 2009. While I observed this class, I saw numerous times that basic skills were overlooked not because Harper did not want to teach them and not because students were incapable of learning them, but because there was a test to be given at the end of the term and there was already insufficient time to teach students to work problems that would enable them to pass this exam. As Harper tried to teach students to graph linear functions, it became evident that many students lacked basic arithmetic skills. For example, students relied on calculators to add and subtract positive and negative numbers and to do basic multiplication, and Harper had to allow them to rely on the calculators for these elementary tasks, for if she used class time to teach the remedial mathematical concepts that were lacking then she would not have time to teach the skills required to pass the End of Course exam. Certainly learning advanced mathematical concepts is important and should be achievable for most students during high school, but it appears that for many students basic skills are sacrificed as schools must push them through more advanced courses in order to get the required credits for a high school diploma. Of this trend in educational goals math teacher Webb stated, "So if we're pushing calculators to speed up the process, we're just speeding up the process of getting work done, we're missing the point of building knowledge. So whereas there needs to be a standard of accountability, it should be a mastery of basic skills that everybody can achieve."

In response to educational reforms that involve increased standards for graduation, math teacher Harper said, "They want every single human being in the United States to be on the same level. And they're not." Principal Reed stated, "We're almost pigeonholing kids and taking away some of their outstanding traits and making everybody the same when not every student is going to be an engineer. As for the requirements, I'd be happy if the kids could be well versed in consumer mathematics." Several teachers also addressed the recent trend in media reports on education, and on the commonly heard statements that American children are lower achievers than children in other countries. Math teacher Webb stated that "if you have some countries that are testing better than the United States, it's probably because these cultures don't test everybody." Science teacher Moore shared this opinion, stating, "We teach every single child, every child...Those countries have tested out their kids sometimes in the sixth grade, the eighth grade, beginning of high school, and sent them down vocational tracks, sent them off the farm totally. And they're not dealing with these kids. These are not the kids tested. All our children are tested. All our kids are being compared."

The teachers and administration also found fault in the implementation of standardized tests to track and compare student achievement. Most teachers consented that for subjects such as mathematics and sciences, multiple choice standardized tests are not always ideal but can serve as fairly appropriate and convenient methods of assessment. However, teachers did not believe that these sorts of assessments are appropriate in all content areas, particularly in language arts and other humanities.

Teachers expressed a wide range of concerns about the use of multiple choice standardized testing, such as the use of these tests with children who have language barriers and learning disabilities. Teachers tended to think that the most common modifications for students with special needs, particularly allowing more test taking time or using a testing proctor to read some or all of the test aloud to students, are helpful but do not solve the problem of finding equitable ways to assess student knowledge and achievement. There is also a problem of taken-for-granted cultural references that often exist in standardized tests, and the existing modifications do not address the difficulties these references may create for students who are from outside the mainstream culture. As Diane Rodriguez et al. (2010:408) state, "For ELLs in U.S. public schools, standardized test results are also likely to reflect limited proficiency in English and a lack of opportunity to learn the subject matter of the tests." English teacher Freeman expressed the concern that not only are multiple choice exams not ideal for testing knowledge of concepts in a high school literature course, but also that issues such as test anxiety can significantly impact a student's performance on an exam. For example, she found that many of her Hispanic students become particularly anxious about taking these exams as they are exclusively written and administered in English, for despite verbal proficiency in the English language, many Hispanic students still struggle with written language.

Business teacher Hereford disagreed with the concept of standardized tests entirely, as she said that "I don't think it needs to be the total of what we base our success on. I think it's sort of judging 180 days of instruction by what we do in one exam. I

know we have to have testing, but I don't think it needs to be standardized. I think each state, or each district in the state, they have to come up with what's going to work best for them because we're all so different!" In general, after charging educators with the responsibility of teaching students adequate skills to meet very detailed sets of standards set forth in state course curricula, these same teachers are not trusted to provide assessments nor are they consulted on how best to assess what their students have learned. The teachers in this study know their students and know what the strengths and weaknesses are of each individual in their classes, but they are never asked. After spending every day working with these students, the teachers must at the end stand by while standardized exams are brought in that will determine how much their students know, and subsequently, how well they have done their jobs.

No Child Left Behind and reforms enacted by the state of Tennessee are intended to close the achievement gap that has traditionally existed between higher achieving middle class white children and lower achieving poor and minority groups. However, the teachers and administration of Midway High School resoundingly responded to this goal by saying that the current reforms in place are not appropriate to improve the achievement levels of their students. They saw recent educational reforms as inappropriate not only for the new and growing English Language Learner/Hispanic population of the school, but for nearly all of their students. The teachers and principal mentioned that the school's student body traditionally comes from economically disadvantaged families, and the recent influx of Hispanic students into the school system has increased racial and cultural diversity while the school remains primarily comprised

of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, for over 55% of the students in the Midway School System are classified as economically disadvantaged (Tennessee Department of Education 2008d). Math teacher Harper asked, "The people who are coming up with all of these rules, who are they? I mean, have they been teachers before? Because I don't think so. I don't think they really understand what kids are capable of doing and what kids we are testing because if they knew what kinds of kids they were making these rules for...there would be exceptions and various rules and various accommodations." Math teacher Webb asserted that "I just think a lot of times politicians don't realize what it takes in the classroom to get a kid to do a simple skill." The teachers continually said that perhaps No Child Left Behind is appropriate at other schools, in other communities, but it is not appropriate for the children of the Midway School system. Recent reforms use the same methods of standardized testing that have traditionally been seen as inequitable for poor and minority children (Ernst 1994:323; Fine et al. 2007:77; Guajardo and Guajardo 2008:15-16), so why now are these methods expected to close the achievement gap?

American public schools have been described as favoring middle class white values and as being structured to promote the success of these students more than poor students and more than racial, cultural, and other minority students (Castagno 2008:326; Hurd 2008:294). English as a Second Language teacher Campbell said, "You know, the reality is schools are middle class white institutions. And tests are set up that way, and part of me says no, that's really not fair." However, she paused, and thought of her students, and said, "Again, whether you like it or not, I tell my students all the time that

in order to be successful they have to adopt the ways of middle class whites. Unfortunately the way society is set up you have to be middle class white to kind of attain some of the status that goes along with being successful."

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Midway High School has seen a dramatic change in the demographic make-up of its student population in recent years. In order to serve the new and growing population of English Language Learners, teachers have used available resources in various ways and made modifications according to individual student needs and preferences. In many ways, the school has been successful in adapting to its more diverse student population. Most Hispanic students scored at or above proficiency levels on standardized tests in recent years, and some Hispanic students are pursuing education after high school. However, an achievement gap still persists as the Hispanic students still do not perform as well as the United States-born white students. The white and Hispanic students remain socially segregated and I also observed some instances of racism.

The teachers of Midway High School work diligently to accommodate the academic needs of all their students, which is a significant challenge in the often overcrowded classes. All the teachers who participated in this study had students of varying academic skill levels as well as students being served in special education and students who were English Language Learners in their mainstream classes. Teachers did their best to make modifications of teaching and assessment that were appropriate for individual students, but it is evident that modifications made for English Language Learners and Hispanic students were often experimental or based on trial and error. The use of oral and written repetition of vocabulary and key terminology was commonly used and appeared to help students in most classes that I observed. Unlike in the case of standardized End of Course Exams, there were no standard or required methods of

modification of instruction or assessment for these students in daily classes and teacher-designed assessments. Teachers chose modifications for instruction and assessments based on individual the abilities, strengths, and weaknesses of their English Language Learning students. They sometimes relied on student preferences for choice of modified materials and often on bilingually capable students for help with the instruction of students with limited English proficiency.

When asked what resources they needed in order to be more successful in teaching English Language Learners, the teachers and principal all stated that ideally they would not ask for any more technology, books, or other materials in their classrooms, but they would ask for their classes to have fewer students. Given the wide range of academic strengths and weaknesses and the variety of special needs of students in mainstream classrooms, teachers cannot devote adequate time to individualized education in classes comprised of thirty to thirty-five students. The teachers generally said that classes of around twenty students would be more manageable both behaviorally and academically, and these smaller classes would be beneficial to students of all demographics and of all academic capabilities. Fewer students in each class would allow teachers to give enough individual attention to both accelerated students and to English Language Learners and other students who need more individualized help or other modifications.

Given that public schools are currently underfunded, it is unrealistic to expect that in the near future Midway High School or other public schools will be able to nearly double their numbers of faculty members in order to create smaller classes. However, if

class sizes remain as they are, it appears that children with special educational needs will continue to have some needs that are not met and teachers will still be forced to teach primarily to the skill level and capabilities of the majority. This leaves not only English Language Learners but all other traditionally lower achieving populations as well as the highest achievers to remain marginalized in the public schools.

Although smaller class sizes would be ideal, some other possibilities exist for at least alleviating the burden on teachers in large classes. More support staff such as teaching assistants or bilingual translators could help reach more students individually. Although these types of staff are not certified teachers, they could help bridge language barriers and give help to individual students in large classes. In addition, the use of more bilingual peer tutors could serve a dual purpose in the school. These students could help students with limited English proficiency in mainstream classes, thus relieving the bilingual students enrolled in these courses from having to serve doubly as students and teachers. These bilingual tutors would also be capable of helping United States-born students and this could help begin to bridge the social and academic divide that exists between Hispanic students and United States-born students at the school.

Teachers are trained to understand the various learning styles of students. However, the teachers of Midway High School work in a community that until recently has seen little racial, linguistic, or cultural diversity. Therefore, both the student body and the faculty of Midway High School were in many ways unprepared for the influx of Hispanic students whose linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds are different from the majority of the school population. Despite large class sizes, teachers have tried

many methods of reaching these students and have found many methods that have been successful, such as the use of translators and peer tutors to work with students and read assessments aloud, the use of Spanish-English dictionaries or other Spanish language materials when students choose to use them, and more emphasis on repetition of key concepts. More staff development, such as teacher training workshops, could serve to help the faculty better adapt to the increased diversity in their classes (McAllister and Irvine 2000:20-21). For example, English as a Second Language teacher Campbell stated that teachers are often unaware of how much repetition is needed to reach students for whom English is not the first language in mainstream classes. Teacher training in methodology for English Language Learners could help the teachers develop ways to work with these students in their classes. In addition to workshops and other staff development training, there are resources available to teachers online. For example, the National Education Association offers a "Diversity Toolkit" with resources for teachers in cultural competence, English Language Learners, social class, gender, race and ethnicity, and social justice (National Education Association 2008). EdChange, another online resource for educators, offers training, publications, and other resources for teachers as well as a "Critical Multicultural Pavilion" page that targets issues of diversity and multicultural education (EdChange 2010a; Edchange 2010b).

In addition to workshops or staff development in educational methodology, training in understanding diverse student populations could greatly help the faculty serve the Hispanic portion of the student body by helping teachers to improve both the academic and the social environments at Midway High School (Asher 2007:71).

Although no teachers expressed stereotypically negative opinions of their Hispanic students, it appeared that this group was still sometimes understood in stereotypical ways and some teachers' statements indicated that they perceived less individual differentiation among this group than among white students. Although many of the Hispanic students are from two particular communities in Mexico, some of the students are from other countries in Central America and the Caribbean, so there are a variety of regional and cultural backgrounds present in the Hispanic population of the school. The teachers who participated in this study often made references to "cultural" differences or behaviors and often hesitantly defined trends they saw in this group as "cultural," seemingly for lack of a better characterization or explanation. Additionally, as the Hispanic population grows in the Midway School System, the instances of racism that occur may begin to come from Hispanic students as well as white students, and the teachers and administration must be prepared to manage student interactions and facilitate positive relationships as the community and student body populations continue to change. Training or workshops that give teachers the tools to effectively understand their more diverse student population and to become leaders in the development of multicultural understanding among students will empower the faculty to reduce prejudice and to foster more communication among students. This, in turn, could ultimately lead to more Hispanic involvement in school activities outside of required academics, such as student organizations, clubs, and athletics.

After high school, students with adequate academic capabilities and educational aspirations are typically expected to "go off to college" in the United States. This

expectation implies that these students or their families can fulfill the economic obligations of university tuition, and it also often implies that students are willing and also able to leave their families in order to pursue further education. This is not always a viable option in many poor and minority groups. For example, among the Hispanic students of Midway High School, most students would have to rely on scholarships or student loans in order to finance education after high school. Additionally, Corbett explained that it is not typical for the Hispanic students in the Midway community to leave home after graduation. Of the eleven Hispanic girls who graduated in the Spring of 2009, nine of those girls had babies or young children of their own. In many of these families, these students are the first individuals to graduate high school, and according to teachers and the principal at Midway High School, few of the graduating Hispanic seniors, male or female, had educational aspirations beyond high school. This lack of educational aspiration may be attributable to a simple lack of understanding of educational opportunities and potential benefits, or it may be due to student perceptions that these opportunities are not available to them given their life circumstances.

In order to help Hispanic students reach their full academic potential, many educators attempt to train these students to become typical "college students" after high school. However, as is the case with other minority groups and with poor students in the United States, this scenario is often very impractical if not impossible for these students. In addition, if these students have parents who were not educated in the United States, they may be unaware of educational opportunities and of potential career paths. Students who have financial or other responsibilities and obligations to their families and students

who have children must often follow non-conventional educational tracks. These may involve distance learning (such as online university courses), part-time education after high school, community college instead of a four-year university, or training in various vocational fields. Rather than promoting conformity to norms that may not be possible or desirable to these students, schools must develop ways to inform students and their families about available educational options, and schools must provide students with the tools they need to pursue these opportunities within the realistic context of their own cultural, economic, and personal lives.

Student achievement and graduation rates are under scrutiny due to No Child Left Behind and other Tennessee Department of Education reforms and modifications to curriculum and graduation requirements. Despite research both before and after the implementation of No Child Left Behind that shows that high stakes multiple choice testing is not equitable to all students in public schools (Ernst 1994:323; Fine et al. 2007:77; Guajardo and Guajardo 2008:15-16), this method of assessment persists in public education. It is not surprising that most of the teachers I interviewed found this type of testing unfair, for as business teacher Hereford mentioned, at the end of a semester students have spent ninety minutes in each course for nearly ninety days, meaning that almost eight thousand minutes of instruction in each course are reduced to a couple hours and a multiple choice test. The problems created by these types of assessments are evident. Not only do these assessments still favor the traditionally highest achieving subgroup of students in public schools, but they create other educational barriers as well.

As was evident in the Foundations course, for example, student deficiencies in basic arithmetic skills were forcibly overlooked in order to make time to teach the skills that would be included in the standardized test at the end of the semester. Calculators were used to accommodate this deficit as there was not ample time to address the development of basic skills and still cover all the components of the curriculum that would be tested. Therefore, despite whether students were able to complete the tasks necessary to answer multiple choice questions regarding linear functions, chances are these skills would not be useful outside of the completion of class assignments and assessments due to the lack of "foundational" mathematical knowledge and skills.

Teachers in language arts and social sciences resoundingly argue that standardized multiple choice testing is not appropriate for the assessment of student knowledge and skills in these content areas. Multiple choice tests do not allow students to explain themselves or to justify their answers on tests involving literary knowledge or reading comprehension. Although the mathematics teachers who participated in this study stated that multiple choice testing is possibly more appropriate in mathematics courses than in language arts courses, they did not assert that this type of testing is either comprehensive or ideal. The multiple choice tests given at the end of courses do not ask students to display their work in the completion of math problems even if multiple steps are required to reach solutions, for example. They do not encourage students to be creative or to use their varied skills of expression; instead, students are limited to choosing correct answers from a list as the way to display their knowledge and mastery of skills, regardless of the content area of study.

There are numerous ways in which students can be assessed for knowledge of facts or mastery of skills. Aside from the standardized Gateway and End of Course tests, the teachers at Midway High School may choose the types of assessments they use in their classrooms throughout the semester. In addition to and often instead of multiple choice questioning, teachers often use assessments that require written answers by students. Other assessment methods I observed included visual projects, oral presentations, or creation of models, items, or other products using the skills students have developed. Students with various learning styles and differing expressive strengths may not perform consistently in all methods of assessment, so it seems unreasonable to use only one method of assessment at every level and in every content area in standardized testing. Rodriguez et al. (2010:408) argue that "classroom-based assessments have more power to evaluate instruction and identify students' personal needs", and that unlike standardized tests classroom-based assessments "provide a well-integrated picture about students' strengths and weaknesses that can guide instruction and encourage greater educational equity for all students" (Rodriguez et al. 2010:409). It is unsurprising that public education in the United States is accused of trying to make all students the same. In a country that valorizes individualism, it is mystifying that these standardized testing trends are accepted in the education of children. It may be somewhat costly and require individual evaluation rather than scanning machines, for example, in order to compile exam scores when alternatives to multiple choice questions are incorporated in the tests. However, in order to fairly test all students, more than one method of assessment is necessary.

Ultimately, the teachers of Midway High School and schools everywhere in the United States hope that upon completion of the academic requirements and graduation from high school, their students will have strong knowledge of themselves both personally and academically. They want their students to learn the mathematical, literary, scientific, historical, and other required content and curricular objectives, but they also want their students to be empowered to make fulfilling lifestyle and career choices. Whether through the paths of education, vocation, military service, or other endeavors after high school, students who have had varied opportunities for learning and expression will be able to pursue activities and jobs that involve their personal interests and utilize and allow them to continue building their individual skills and strengths. In order for all children to develop this power through education, equitable instruction and assessment must be available regardless of students' socioeconomic class, gender, race, culture, or other difference. In order to be empowering, education must foster the development of knowledge. Effective teachers must serve as models and leaders to children in this endeavor; they must not merely be the communicators of facts and skills that satisfy curriculum objectives. Policy makers and many educators have lost sight of the fact that education does not have to make all children the same in order to prove that it has been equitable. Whether at the level of elementary school, middle school, high school, or beyond, educators must remember that "we teach people, not content" (Sapp 2001:21).

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